

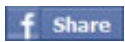
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BY BADR ALMOTAWA, ARAB NEWS STAFF

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Author: By Badr Almotawa, Arab News Staff

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JEDDAH, 8 September — Saudi Arabia yesterday urged the United States to produce convincing evidence for the alleged association of Saudi businessman Wael Hamza Julaidan with Osama Bin Laden's Al-Qaeda network. "Those who make this accusation should provide convincing evidence," Interior Minister Prince Naif told reporters when asked about Friday's US decision to freeze Julaidan's assets.

However, Prince Naif emphasized that the Kingdom would not accept involvement of its citizens in terrorist activities. "Our cooperation with other countries will be on the basis of facts, with regard to arrest of individuals or freezing of their assets," the interior minister said. Prince Naif reiterated Riyadh's commitment to implement the UN resolution that calls for freezing the assets of terror suspects.

Earlier, Prince Nawaf, director of intelligence, expressed his surprise at the US decision. "I hope the report is untrue because it would be unfortunate if a Saudi businessman was assisting and funding terrorism," Prince Nawaf told Okaz newspaper.

"It's very, very unfortunate," the intelligence chief said following the announcement from Washington that Julaidan's name had been added to a list of sponsors of terrorism. "Today the United States and Saudi Arabia jointly designated Wael Hamza Julaidan, an associate of Osama Bin Laden and a supporter of Al-Qaeda terror," the US Treasury Department said on Friday.

Julaidan, who is a well-known charity worker and has run the Makkah-based Rabita Trust

Islamic charity since February 2000, said he received the US decision with frustration.

Speaking to Arab News, he said he was contacting a group of experts to take further steps to confront the US action. He also wanted to confirm the report that the US authorities took the decision in consultation with the Saudi Finance Ministry.

The Treasury Department stated that Saudi Arabia itself had forwarded Julaidan's name to the United Nations to be added to the list of individuals and organizations that sponsor terrorism.

Just days after the Sept. 11 attacks for which Bin Laden has been blamed, Rabita Trust was added to the list of terrorist financiers and its assets were frozen. Julaidan's name was not included at that time. However, he was included in a trillion-dollar civil suit filed recently in the United States by more than 1,000 relatives of people killed in the 9/11 attacks.

The United States has so far frozen the assets of some 236 people, businesses and organizations designated as terrorist financiers. In all, Washington and its allies have blocked more than \$112 million in assets.

A source at the Muslim World League, which runs the Rabita Trust, said yesterday that Julaidan had parted ways with Bin Laden several years ago, and well before the Sept. 11 attacks, after a "dispute".

Speaking on condition of anonymity, he told AFP Julaidan was still working with the Muslim World League. "He has been with the League for the last 10 to 12 years," said the source. Julaidan is a businessman from a well-connected family based in Madinah.

"Today's action is important in that it demonstrates the commitment of both the United States and Saudi Arabia to go after high-impact targets in our war against terrorist financing," said Treasury Undersecretary for Enforcement Jimmy Gurule, adding that Washington had received "unprecedented cooperation" from Riyadh on the matter.

The US Treasury Department accused that Julaidan "has been the head of various non-governmental organizations providing financial and logistical support to the Al-Qaeda network."

Washington says that Julaidan fought with Bin Laden against the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s. In an interview with the Qatari-based news channel Al-Jazeera in 1999, Bin Laden himself referred to Julaidan as "our brother". Last October, Julaidan made a statement denying his links with Al-Qaeda. "I want to emphasize that there is no connection between the Rabita Trust for Repatriation of Stranded Pakistanis or myself with Al-Qaeda or Osama Bin Laden. The news story was completely baseless," he said denying a Washington Post report.

Arab News has learned that Julaidan had disagreed with Bin Laden on the formation of Al-Qaeda, as he believed that enthusiastic Arab youths would be uncontrollable once they returned to their native countries. Julaidan together with the late Abdullah Azzam, a prominent Arab-Afghan leader, said that the duty of Arab fighters should be restricted to Afghanistan's operations, which were limited to aid and military, in tandem with the Afghan Mujahedeen.

Bin Laden had called for the formation of an independent front for the Arab fighters. But Azzam and Julaidan believed the Arab-Afghans would serve the Afghan cause much better if they were distributed on different fronts headed by Afghan leaders.

According to an earlier report published in Arab News, Julaidan had left Bin Laden in 1990, as they no longer had much in common. Then Bin Laden established his own front that consisted of his Egyptian friends from the Jihad organization. At that time, Azzam was killed along with two of his sons. "Julaidan, thereafter, confined his operations toward aid and joined the Muslim World League, moving between Islamabad and Peshawar," the report said.

According to the report, there was a clear mix-up in the inclusion on the list of the Rabita Trust, which supports the stranded Bihari refugees. The trust works with the knowledge and acceptance of the Pakistani government and its honorary chairman is President Pervez Musharraf.

Julaidan was an active relief worker in Afghanistan throughout the second half of the 1980s and again during a later, short period. He was also temporarily head of the Saudi Red Crescent Society and the Muslim World League there.

He had strong relations with leaders of the various Afghan factions, in his capacity as an official in charge of distributing large-scale Saudi relief aid to Afghan refugees. He had also established relations with then Pakistani President Muhammad Zia-ul Haq and his successor former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

"The last significant role Julaidan played in Afghanistan was as a liaison between the warring (Gulbuddin) Hekmatyar and (Ahmed Shah) Masood in Kabul, along with other Muslim leaders. When he felt that his liaison attempts were of no use to stop the warring parties, Julaidan left Afghanistan at the end of 1992," the report said.

Thereafter, Julaidan settled in the Kingdom, engaged in commercial activities. He then joined the aid operations to Bosnia, where he supervised temporarily the Saudi Aid Committee, the largest aid organization then in Bosnia. "During this period Julaidan was away from the Arab Mujahedeen," the report pointed out. "The fund received by the Rabita Trust is very limited and transparent. We invite all the concerned authorities to check the accounts of the trust thoroughly and find out the truth," Julaidan was quoted as saying. The members of the trust included Pakistan's ministers of finance and interior, Prince Talal, secretaries-general of the Muslim World League and the International Islamic Relief Organization and president of the Council of Saudi Chamber of Commerce.

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